CHAPTER II.

Official Duties, etc.—I.

The Office of an Assistant Collector in charge of a Prant consists usually of a Sheristedar and two to four clerks. The Sheristedar is an upper-grade man with ambitions to become a Mamlatdar, and he and his clerks know very much more about the running of an office than any new Assistant Collector can. Therefore do not be in a hurry to make any changes in the organisation of your office. But it is most important that you should learn as soon as possible to control its working yourself, for otherwise you cannot possibly supervise your charge efficiently. The Office.

You will have to study the "Breviary of Office Procedure and Records" and though, until you have had some experience of your own and Mamlatdars' offices, this book may appear a howling wilderness of biliterals and triliterals, it is important that you grasp the principles and, as far as your own and Mamlatdars' offices are concerned, the details also of the system and eventually see that they are applied.

"The public presume that an Officer, especially a young one, is under the influence of his Sheristedar, and the average Sheristedar, being human, does not discourage the idea. It should be the Officer's business not only to be independent but, what is equally important, to show the people that he is so. Yet this should not be done in such a manner as to injure the Sheristedar's *amour propre*. He is generally selected on account of ability and experience which may be utilised with good effect, and nothing is gained, but

much lost, by, without reason, suspecting or belittling him or ignoring his opinion."

"The Assistant Collector should be careful not to accept and sign papers merely on the word of the Sheristedar, also not to disregard the opinion of a trustworthy Mamlatdar as against that of the Sheristedar; also to check the inclination of an indolent Sheristedar to send work to the Mamlatdar, such as the preparation of returns, which ought to be done in his own office. The Assistant Collector should not pass on to the Mamlatdars, as a matter of course, the conduct of investigations or the taking of statements. If he has the time to spare he should occasionally do the work himself."

The office has normally two great faults which are the result of tradition and of the volume of work. The first is that of sitting on correspondences merely because they are large and will need a good deal of work before they can be put up before the Assistant Collector for orders. Clerks, like most of us, are inclined to deal with easy matters first, and you may perhaps find in your office cases which have been lying there for months, if not for years, without making any progress. The second fault is that of referring matters which seem likely to give any difficulty, to the Mamlatdar and others "for enquiry and report", without taking the trouble to indicate on what exactly a report is needed, or what information is required. And naturally when the Assistant Collector's control is thus lax in his own office, the Mamlatdar's office either sits on the papers or sends them on to the Circle Inspector, who in turn may pass them on to the village officers for report.

The general result being a large increase in the paper bulk of the case, much delay, and greatly increased difficulty of arriving at a final decision.

"It is a good thing to require the Sheristedar to prepare and bring up for information every month a list of references to and by the office, which have been pending unanswered for more than a month. More especially should this list be consulted at the inspection of the respective Mamlatdars' offices, and explanation of undue delays obtained."

Unless the Sheristedar is much above the average, it is important not to allow him to send out papers under his own signature, except when the endorsement is absolutely routine. Equally, before signing anything put up by the Sheristedar or the office, you should make certain that the order or letter gives, or asks for, all the information required, and leaves no excuse for misunderstanding or delay.

All English correspondence should be drafted by you in your own words and not by the office. All orders or decisions in revenue and other cases such as watan proceedings, encroachment cases, departmental proceedings etc. should be written or typed by your own hand just as much as a judgment in a criminal case must be.

Incidentally, if you do not know already how to use a typewriter, it is advisable to start practising as soon as possible. A typed letter or order is naturally easier for the recipient to read than most peoples' hand-writing, and a typewriter has the great advantage that you can make a copy of confidential matters without having laboriously to copy it out by hand.

Correspondences.

"Fewer too will be the large correspondences which have gone on gathering bulk for years, under the care of the Sheristedar whose only aim is to postpone the trouble of grappling with the subject and coming to a decision. Such files will often supply examples of every kind of fault, unnecessary and vague questions asked, careless and incomplete answers given, long delays that have never been detected by the Inspecting authority, ignorance of the rules applicable, and sheer stupidity. They should be taken in hand, offenders called to account, and subordinates made to understand that they are paid to get work done, not merely to correspond about it."

As soon as you have acquired a working knowledge of the language make a habit of occasionally reading yourself some of the vernacular correspondences in your office and of writing the endorsements on them yourself. The knowledge that the Assistant Collector can and does read and write the vernacular, and that bad work cannot be concealed by being in that language, has a stimulating effect on the Mamlatdars, Clerks and Circle Inspectors. This practice also is particularly useful when doing flying camps (*see* under "Touring") while your office is left behind to inspect the Mamlatdar's office at the taluka headquarters.

On taking over a new charge, or shortly after you have undertaken your first charge, see personally *all* correspondences in your office, getting the Sheristedar and each clerk to bring up to you *every* case lying with him and to explain each of them briefly. Initial and date each case yourself to indicate that you have seen it and when. At the same time mark any correspondence which you regard as particularly urgent and

needing early disposal. The regular repetition of this procedure once a month or so should prevent old correspondences continuing in your office without your knowledge, and, if a clerk fails to bring such up on any occasion, you can then take disciplinary action against him for concealing the case.

Officers' Diaries.

A task which seems boring and laborious is that of going through the diaries of Mamlatdars and Circle Inspectors, but it is one that cannot be neglected if you are to run your charge efficiently. The Mamlatdar's diaries go on to the Collector with the Assistant Collector's remarks but the Circle Inspector's diaries do not go further than the Assistant Collector. If you go through the Circle Inspectors' diaries with a map, it will teach you the geography of a new charge and will also show whether the Circle Inspectors are getting about their charges, or are merely making hurried trips out from and back to Taluka Headquarters or are neglecting any part which they ought to see. Do not omit to give a word of praise in your remarks on a diary for any especially good work done.

The Circle Inspector's post is a difficult one because he has much more work than he can possibly perform. He is low-paid and sometimes has been pushed into the post, as being useless elsewhere. But his position as a supervising and enquiry officer of a status between the village officer and the Mamlatdar is of considerable importance. Both encouragement and careful supervision is needed to get good work from him.

Post.

•Always open all your English post yourself, and, whenever you will not unnecessarily delay the work of your office, the vernacular post also. Each letter or

case received should be marked in ink with your initials and the date, month and year (a big case may quite possibly last over a couple of years and it is well to know in which year you received a paper). Mark for immediate disposal anything which is very urgent, and with experience you will be able to give other directions for disposing of letters, etc., which will save your office much time in wondering what to do with them. It is not necessary to read all the bulk of the vernacular correspondences, a glance at the last endorsement or two and putting your initials and date to prevent delay in office is usually enough. But the daily seeing your vernacular post gives you an idea of the work of your office that you may not get otherwise. It also gives opportunity to spot which Mamlatdar's offices have a habit of delaying papers or making muddled reports.

Petitions.

Petitions by post should always be opened personally and read personally—they may contain allegations against subordinates which it is unfair that anyone else should see. Much work can be saved by the Assistant Collector giving orders on all petitions on the first instance.

Some petitions do not contain sufficient information, or some necessary copy of Government records, and these should be returned immediately for supplying it. Others deal with matters which are not the concern of the Revenue Department. These can be either forwarded to the appropriate officer or returned to the petitioners with instructions as to whom to approach.

As an example of the wrong method of dealing with petitions, see page 81, Manual of Revenue Accounts—

"I once saw a case about a foot thick. It had cost Government about Rs. 1,000 in work of officers and clerks and postage for about two years. It began with a petition raising rather complicated allegations and legal points. It ended in the Collector directing the parties to the Civil Court. If he had endorsed that order below the first petition it would have saved Government about Rs. 1,000 and would have saved the parties perhaps twice as much and would have put them on the way to a final settlement about 3 years earlier."

Others deal with matters for which no remedy is provided, e.g., requests for an Assistant Collector to interfere with the decision of a Civil Court.

These last however cannot *always* be neglected. Cases do sometimes occur of the perversion of justice, for instance, a money-lender may procure someone to impersonate before the Sub-Registrar the owner of land which he wants to buy, and thus get a false sale-deed executed on which a suit is filed in the Civil Court. If therefore such a petition seems from its details to be credible, the Assistant Collector can call up the petitioner or make personal enquiries in the village. This is perhaps particularly likely to happen in tracts inhabited by backward tribes whose land, or when their land is inalienable, their mango and other valuable trees are considered fair game by unscrupulous money-lenders and richer cultivators.

Some petitions received by post will be of the nature of criminal complaints and these must be returned

with an endorsement that they should be presented in person to the appropriate magistrate. Other petitions are such that it would be unwise to start any inquiries unless and until the facts alleged are verified by the petitioners on oath, e.g., allegations of corruption, oppression, etc., against subordinates, and the petitioners may be asked to present themselves personally to the Assistant Collector for their statements to be taken.

Anonymous petitions should in practically all cases be destroyed at sight. They should never be sent for "enquiry and report" unless there are very strong reasons for believing the truth of the allegations, and, when such a petition concerning a revenue matter has to be sent for "enquiry and report", it should not be sent to anyone except confidentially to the Mamlatdar himself, who must make enquiries personally and report confidentially. Whenever possible, it is better for the Assistant Collector himself to take action necessary on anonymous petitions, keeping them meanwhile in his own custody. Very occasionally anonymous petitions confirm previous suspicions and give such detailed information that verification or disproof of the allegations is easy. Anonymous petitions alleging the commission of cognizable crimes may be sent demi-officially to the District Superintendent of Police for disposal. He can then order inquiry by the local Police or not as he thinks fit.

But it is necessary to remember that *any* enquiry undertaken on an anonymous petition will serve the object of the writer, which is to give trouble to the person against whom the allegations are made. An enquiry, even into false allegations, stirs up mud which damages an official's reputation, for people at once begin to say

"There is no smoke without fire", etc., etc. It is better to have it known locally that the Assistant Collector tears up all anonymous petitions himself without even the Sheristedar seeing them.

Pseudonymous petitions are rather troublesome. Where you suspect a petition to be pseudonymous, write by registered post to the applicant to appear before you and verify his petition, or where the applicant's address is distant and, if existent, he would find it difficult to attend your camp, instruct the Mamlatdar to call up the applicant and verify his bona fides before undertaking any inquiry. If the applicant does not appear, or if he appears and proves that someone had used his name without his knowledge, tear up the petition.

Visitors and petitioners.

"....It is perhaps better, when the habits are so formed as to admit of it, that the natives of all classes and ranks should have admission, and be heard, at whatever hour of the day they come, except at those of meals. But where such constant intrusion is found to interrupt other business, certain portions of every day must be set aside to hear representations and complaints, and see those who desire to be seen. The establishment of direct intercourse is, in my opinion, a primary and indispensable duty, one no more dependent upon the inclination or judgment of the individual than it is to an officer whether he shall attend his parade, or to a judge whether he shall sit a certain number of hours in his Court." Sir John Malcolm. (Quoted in Nairne's Handbook for Revenue Officers.)

Petitioners. In addition to petitions which reach you by post, a number will be presented in person. For the receipt of petitions fix a definite time in the latter part of the afternoon and, whatever work you may be doing each day at that hour, stop it for a time and take petitions from petitioners. Have your office naik shout loudly for "Arzadar" and give them a minute or two to assemble from the places where they may have been waiting. Take each petition in turn, read it yourself or have it read by a clerk in the presence of the petitioner, who, in the latter case, is thus able to see that the petition writer has put down correctly what was told him. You will probably find that in almost every petition you have to question the petitioner to elicit some more facts. Where you find a petition should be refused at once, return it to the petitioner after yourself making an endorsement that it is refused, or that it should be presented to some other official, etc. Be as patient as you can, in listening to petitioners for it is possible that they may have come a long way to put forward their grievances and they may justifiably feel hurt, if immediately turned down with a few curt words. A petitioner may or may not believe you when you say that you can do nothing, but at least afford him an opportunity of placing his case before you, and give him in return as full an explanation as you can as to why you cannot give him assistance.

When you are pressed for time and a petition is not clear, get one of your clerks to write down a statement from the petitioner and you go through it with him (the petitioner) later in the afternoon. Remember that petitions which are criminal complaints need careful

examination and that this examination has to be made by you yourself and not by a clerk. (See page 46.)

In addition to persons who come with regular written complaints, you will be beset, at all hours of the day and at all places by persons wanting to tell you their grievances and difficulties. These must not be repelled however burdensome this duty may be. The following is an extract of a letter written by Maharaja Pratapsinha of Satara in 1829 to Grant Duff, late Resident at Satara, after his retirement to Scotland.

"From—Maharaja Pratapsinha of Satara ;

To—James Grant Duff, Esq.,
of Eden, Banff, N. B.

Satara, 18th July 1829.

OUR FRIEND,

* * * *

Thus far methodically and regularly the public business is transacted here every day with facility and despatch. You say that we do more business in our palace than in our public office. To this we answer during your stay here the poor and the weak had been allowed to resort to you in the road also (while you were coming to the public office from your bungalow) as well as in your bungalow too in order to state more

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Quoted in "James Grant Duff's Private correspondence with Maharaja Pratapsinha of Satara"
by Mr. D. B. Diskalkar, M.A., Curator, Historical Museum, Satara,

freely their grievances and the misconduct and oppressions of the public servants: We have been following the same example both in the road and in our palace. Except thus hearing and gaining information, no more business has been done in the latter place. By this the various branches of public business go on very regularly and the public servants behave more better and the business is despatched too quick. If this mode of obtaining information is neglected, ignorance, it seems, would prevail and communication on various matters would be wanting."

Conversations.

Talking with people will waste much of your time, but it will provide you with much information which you will not get by any other means.

Make it a habit, when riding or walking about the country, to converse with almost everybody you meet. If you are of a retiring nature, this will be an effort at first, but by practice you can, if you have a genuine interest in your charge, cultivate this habit of casual conversation. If the villager knows that the Assistant Collector on his walk in the evening is quite willing to stop and talk, it will be then that he will come with his grievance about the money extorted by the Circle Inspector for getting his boundary marks repaired, or the bribe which he had to pay to the Police Havildar to prevent a false case being made against him by his enemies, or the Irrigation subordinate who would not provide water for his withering crops until extortionately paid, or the Magistrate in whose court cases are decided for pecuniary considerations. None of these matters will the cultivator usually come and tell you publicly as a petitioner in your office. Of course it is most annoying when riding home in a hurry, late for

your breakfast by two hours or so, to have your bridle seized by a Bhil who wants to point out to you where the rich money-lender has removed the boundary mark of his field and encroached on the Bhil's. And of course without the village map and papers you can make no inquiry in the matter, and without hearing the money-lender you cannot come to a decision; but however hot the sun and however tired yourself, you must stop and listen to what the Bhil has to say and only after listening and some questions, tell him to come to your camp in the afternoon. If you were to hurry on without waiting to listen, the Bhil would probably be too discouraged to think of attending your camp, however genuine his grievance may be.

(An Assistant Collector's often seems a dog's life, but if you think so, compare it with a Bhil's or Mahar's.)

Visitors.

As part of your duties you have to receive a number of visitors, i.e., callers as distinct from petitioners, who may come to see you either "to pay their respects" or on business. As far as the arrangements of your bungalow or camp will permit, see that provision is made for some waiting room for persons coming to see you, or at the very least for the provision of chairs in the verandah or in the shade of a tree, where they can wait without being herded with menials.

Secondly, very definitely insist that your peons bring to you each caller's card, or a slip of paper with his name and business, *as soon as he arrives*, whether you are otherwise busy or not. It is then possible, when you will not be free for some time, to write a note on the back of the card saying that you will be busy for

the next half hour or whatever it may be, and suggesting that he might prefer to call later instead of waiting. If the visitor is of great importance or sends back a note that the matter is extremely urgent, there is no harm in interrupting the case that you are trying or the meal that you are eating, to go out and speak a few words to him personally to discover whether his business can really wait or not.

It is useful in your bungalow or camp to arrange your office table so that you can watch the arrival of visitors. This serves as a useful check to see that your peons bring in the cards of callers promptly and that visitors receive proper respect from the peons. The bringing in of a card at once also sometimes serves the useful purpose of giving the valid excuse of another caller, in order to end a boring or over-lengthy interview.

It is well for you to be willing to see callers at all hours of the day consistent with the performance of your other duties, as the reputation of being accessible at any time is valuable, and you will then receive much more information and make many more friends than if you can only be seen by appointment or between certain hours of certain days of the week.

There is no harm, however, in having a typewritten card with your peons to cover, say, the period of your midday meal, e.g.

> "Except in case of urgency, the Assistant Collector does not receive visitors between the hours of 11 and 12."

If you are interested in your charge you will find no lack of local topics for discussion with your callers,

though it is well to practise making small talk to begin with, so as to let your caller work round to the matter on which he has really come to see you.

It is useful to keep a list of callers with a note of any matters of interest concerning them, or their interviews with you. This will help you in writing your notes when you hand over charge and also will ensure your not overlooking any friends, when issuing invitations for a Durbar, or a Governor's visit, and the like.

An easy way is to keep all visitors' cards in alphabetical order in a small box as a sort of card index. Visitors who have not produced cards can have their names written up on a supply of blank visiting cards which you will keep handy. If you keep this card index in your confidential box you can then write very brief confidential notes about each person on the back of his visiting card.

Chairs.

Not all your visitors will expect the offer of a chair when they come to call. Title holders, educated gentlemen, big landlords, members of Municipalities, of District and Taluka Local Boards, Sar Panchas of Village Panchayats, officers of other Departments such as Police Sub-Inspectors, Range Forest Officers, or Assistant Engineers, should of course be given chairs, and you should see that your peons place a chair ready before the visitor is shown in. Among your own subordinates chairs should be given to Mamlatdars and Aval-karkuns, but not to clerks, Circle Inspectors, Talatis nor normally to Village Patels. Regarding the last class, those Patels who would be given a chair in another capacity, e.g., as members of a Local Board, should be given chairs. Officers of other Departments

lower in rank than the examples given above such as Police Havildars, Public Works Department Overseers, etc., would not expect chairs and would be rather embarrassed by the offer, as also would be ordinary cultivators, petty merchants and the like.

In dealing with non-officials it is better to err on the side which gives the least offence and therefore not to be too sparing in the offer of a chair.

Recommendations.

You will often be importuned to give "chits" recommending people generally or for their past services. In the case of Government servants, it is a good rule to explain that you never give a chit or a recommendatory letter to any Government servant above the rank of a pattawalla, and that you are sure they do not wish to be classed with menials. Any remarks you may have to make on your own subordinates will be entered in their confidential records. If the officer is not serving under you, it would be impertinent for you to give him a letter of recommendation which he ought to obtain from the head of his office.

When an officer of another Department has been helpful to you in any way, you can write D. O. to his superior officer thanking him for his subordinate's services.

When a non-official has been really helpful in any particular matter, a personal D. O. letter of thanks should be written and such is always appreciated by the recipient.

But a general letter of recommendation, similar in principle to a servant's chit, should be rigorously avoided. Your signature to such a letter is in effect a guarantee of your judgment of the man, and many who would hesitate to stand financial surety for an acquaintance, are willing, on little or no excuse, to guarantee his claims to respectability, efficiency, suitability for an appointment and the like. If you should recommend an unsuitable person, that will reduce your own credit, by showing that at least you are not a good judge of character, and will thus depreciate the value of any other recommendation you may make. If importuned for a letter of recommendation, you may say that you will send it direct to the person to whom it is to be addressed, or, if this is not acceptable, you may merely write a formal note that you have known A. B. for so long and he has asked you for a letter of recommendation to Mr. X. Y. Z.

In particular do not give recommendatory chits to itinerant vendors, magicians, horse dealers and the like. Such persons are apt to live by their wits, and a letter from an Assistant Collector on the best official stationery may be used as a means of establishing confidence with the unwary to their financial disadvantage. Such letters, waved in the face of inexperienced police officers or Patels, may help to postpone a well deserved arrest for some recent crime, as minor officials will be nervous of arresting some one who claims to be your friend. Anyway, do not yourself place reliance

on such chits from officials and others of however high station. These,—owing to the softness of some high officers' hearts,—are no guarantee of respectability, nor can you be sure that the bearer is the original recipient.

Books. The following books about your Revenue work should be kept handy on your table whether at head-quarters or on tour:—

Land Revenue Code.

Land Revenue Orders.

Manual of Revenue Accounts.

Manual of Tagai and its Accounts.

Manual of Land Acquisition for the Bombay Presidency.

A Manual for Village Panchayats etc., Part II.

Manual of Instructions for Government Officers in connection with the Village Improvement Scheme.

Phadnis's Watan Act.

Breviary of Office Procedure.

District Gazetteer.

Settlement Reports, Original and Revision, of the Talukas of your Sub-Division.

Bombay Civil Service Rules.